A Comprehensive View of LEADERSHIP

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If you ask several soldiers for their meaning of "Leadership," they will probably have several different definitions. The author discusses his definition and offers four leadership functions for consideration. He argues that an organization or unit that is guided by these functions has a clearly identified path to follow and will accomplish its assigned missions. An organization or unit without this direction will not always accomplish its assigned missions and will generally be ineffective.

EVERY Army leader, active or retired, should be considered knowledgeable on the subject of leadership. This is only natural since this has been the essence of the military profession. I have learned much from the views of others and have developed my own way of thinking about leadership and how to talk to younger leaders about it.

Before one can understand and write about what leaders ought to *be*, *know* and *do* (and that is a good way to talk about leadership), one ought to be clear about what leaders are *for* in a more fundamental sense. What are the critical leadership functions performed by Army officers as they lead small and large units within an Army preparing for, deterring and conducting war on behalf of a free society? How are these functions performed differently as one proceeds up the scale from sergeant to general? How do *being*, *knowing* and *doing* change at each level and how do we prepare our leaders to advance? The purpose of this article is to propose a systematic way to ask and answer those questions and to thus learn more about the science and art of leadership.

There is general agreement that leadership is the art of influencing others to take action toward a goal, and that military leadership is the art of influencing soldiers in units to accomplish unit missions. It is also generally understood that small-unit leaders rely on direct-influence processes while senior leaders rely more on indirect processes in proportion to their seniority. This is a slim framework for understanding the leadership function—why we *have* leaders.

What are the key leadership functions that must be performed to produce truly effective military organizations? Effective organizations have clearly defined purposes, respond to direction, are composed of people motivated to pursue organizational purposes along clearly identified paths and have programs that sustain their effectiveness over time. Organizations without these critical characteristics are not effective. *Leaders* provide purpose. They also establish direction, generate motivation and sustain effectiveness. They may do more, but they cannot do less. Thus effectiveness can be reduced to four leadership functions—providing purpose, establishing direction, generating motivation for unit actions and sustaining the effectiveness of the unit for future tasks (providing for continuity and constant improvement of the organization). All other functions are really subfunctions of these four; they facilitate the accomplishment of one or more of these four primary functions. For instance, setting the proper unit values may

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facilitate all four, but the reason for having the proper values is not that they are an end in and of themselves but they are a means to an ultimate end—a unit that can be led to accomplish its intended aims with greater effectiveness.

Four Primary Functions of Effective Military Leadership

Although the four primary functions of effective leadership are interdependent, we discuss purpose first because effective directing, motivating and sustaining require a focus or aim. We discuss directing next because it is composed of the actions the leader takes to guide the unit in the direction of purpose. Motivating follows this because it comprises the actions the leader takes to impel individuals within the unit to follow the directing guidance. We discuss sustaining effectiveness last because it is primarily an activity with long-range payoffs.

Provide and Instill Purpose. The effective leader must be an effective link in the chain of command. The leader must possess a broad vision to guide the organization drawing meaning or purpose from this vision for unit activity. The leader must have a clear idea of how the organization fits into a larger scheme—why they are doing what they are doing. The leader imparts a sense of purpose on subordinates and instills a sense of purpose in soldiers, aligning unit missions, goals and objectives within broader schemes and purposes.

To shape the vision, the effective leader may draw upon many sources:

- Beginning with the oath of office to defend and support the Constitution, or even higher moral and spiritual imperatives.
- Draw on institutional and national values, goals and aspirations to formulate the concept of purpose he articulates to subordinates.

A leader's commander and the next higher headquarters will transmit their articulation of purpose both directly and indirectly. In combat, this may be directly and clearly expressed (paragraphs 1b., 2 and 3 of the operations order he receives). A leader may have to read between the lines of their words or actions to clearly understand the commander's intent (or the vision from which they derive purpose). This is called "restating the mission" and "identifying the implied tasks." A leader must remain aware of events beyond those involving the unit. In reality, this may require filling gaps in the picture of purpose by deductive or inductive logic.

However arriving at the conception of purpose, the effective leader passes on a coherent picture of how the unit mission fits into the "big picture." Imparting a sense of importance of the tasks to be accomplished and how success or failure of the unit mission will affect the world beyond the unit. In combat, events will not unfold as planned, assumptions may prove to be wrong and assigned tasks may not be appropriate. Knowing the purpose of the unit mission helps subordinates judge what new tasks would be more appropriate. Understanding the purpose of unit missions (the "intent of higher commanders") aids them in coordinating their unit's actions with those of others and leads to overall harmony in execution and economy of effort toward common goals. It provides a frame of reference for independent thought and decision making by subordinates to solve unanticipated problems, which are best resolved and acted on rapidly.

As one proceeds from squad to the highest strategic levels, the leader must become more active in clarifying and transmitting purpose as it becomes more conceptual, longer range and ephemeral. At the highest levels, there may be a great deal of latitude in shaping, articulating and refining purpose. And higher values such as the oath of office and moral and spiritual impera-

A gunner in Vietnam returns fire on enemy positions as his assistant feeds him rounds.

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tives, while important at all levels, play a more significant role because less specific guidance is provided. At squad level, it may be simply to know, pass on and imbue squad members with a simple idea such as "We must take out that bunker because it is holding up the platoon or company advance," or "We will train hard because we want to be the best squad in the company."

At all levels, it is the duty of leaders to clarify the purpose of their missions by asking appropriate questions, if time permits, and to inform subordinates appropriately. (It is also well known that there is a motivational side benefit of letting soldiers know the purpose of their sacrifices—the more important the purpose, the greater the motivational benefit.) The key benefit of providing and instilling purpose is to ensure that what is to be done is accomplished so as to fit into a higher scheme. This is the mechanism that aids synchronization in an environment where initiative is highly valued.

Providing Direction. Effective leaders provide unambiguous direction and guidance for action. They have a clear vision of what must be done, what is necessary to get the job done and how to proceed. They clearly articulate and assign objectives, missions and goals to subordinates. In addition to such direct guidance, they also provide indirect guidance. They promote values; set standards for accomplishment of tasks; enforce discipline; establish standard operating procedures; ensure the training of soldiers and units in appropriate doctrine, methods and techniques; and establish policies and regulations. At the highest levels, military leaders also may be responsible for development of doctrine, methods and techniques in some or all areas.

Providing direction effectively requires command and control skills, processes and functions—information gathering, analysis, decision making, issuing instructions or orders,

performing appropriate supervision and monitoring the effectiveness of the resulting actions. Effective leadership in combat is measured in terms of the speed and effectiveness of this cycle (often called the decision cycle) relative to that of the enemy.

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As leadership advances from the squad to the highest levels, the function of providing direction becomes more complex. Setting and communicating standards, promoting values, enforcing discipline, establishing methods and procedures, and command and control processes become more dependent on systems and organizational functionaries than on direct interpersonal relations. Management, the control of things and the coordination and sequencing of events, while applicable at all levels, becomes an important tool in providing direction at senior levels of leadership. It is in this sense that it relates to leadership.

Effective senior leaders know that even the act of gathering information about the activities of subordinates may cause a reorientation of those activities. They take this into account in designing systems that will gather information purposefully. They ask for meaningful reports and develop unobtrusive ways to find out what they need to know without unintentionally reorienting the focus of subordinate activity.

Providing Motivation. Effective leaders provide motivation—they harness the willingness of subordinates to work toward common goals, missions, objectives and tasks. All combat is, in the end, a test of wills—both of soldiers and leaders. In combat, leaders must motivate soldiers to do difficult things in trying circumstances. In peacetime, motivation to perform tasks well is important. In combat, it can be decisive. Marshal Maurice de Saxe, writing in the 18th century, pointed out that "a soldier's courage must be reborn daily," and Ardant du Picq, writing in the 19th, remarked that "you can reach into the well of courage only so many times before the well runs dry."

It is common knowledge that motivation promoted by rewards is more effective in generating commitment than motivation promoted by punishments. Providing positive motivation should be the aim of all leaders, but negative sanctions are also important for delineating the limits of acceptable behavior. Effective leaders elicit willing compliance and devote a considerable effort to obtaining it.

Means and methods for motivating soldiers differ at various levels. At all levels of authority, mutual trust and confidence are key, but styles may differ.

The moral force that impels subordinates to action at all levels is rooted in mutual trust and respect. This in turn stems from a record of association and a reputation for ethical behavior and sound decision making. Values, or held beliefs, when appropriate and shared in the unit, are important motivators. "This unit can't be beat" and "This unit doesn't leave its dead on the battlefield" are examples. Ethics are standards of behavior in relation to values. Mutual trust and respect derive in part from perceptions of ethical behavior and in part from a record of success. Mutual trust and respect also derive from "taking care of the troops." When troops know that their efforts will not be wasted on unnecessary tasks; that the leader recognizes the value and quality of their labors and is doing the best to meet their needs within the constraints imposed; is concerned about them as human beings; listens to their grievances; and respects subordinates and builds their self–esteem; they will give their full measure of support. All of these factors combine to provide the leader the moral force he needs to motivate in stressful situations in combat, or anytime.

A Japanese bunker on Kwajalein is assaulted by a 7th Division flamethrower, 4 February 1944.

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American soldiers have always fought well when they feel they are in a good outfit and trust their leaders. At the lowest levels, direct daily face–to–face appeals to values, insistence on standards and a record of fairness, self–discipline, competence, displays of example, courage and resourcefulness are the most effective motivators. At times, especially in combat, resorting to intimidation may be necessary, but intimidation never elicits a full measure of commitment. At the highest levels, personal displays of courageous example, self–discipline, fairness, competence and force of personality (in both a positive and negative sense) are occasionally necessary and effective, but a more complex system of authority, mutual trust and confidence must be established.

At the higher levels, soldiers learn to trust the collective leadership of "higher headquarters" when that leadership is reliable and demonstrably sound. A trusted and respected senior leader will have difficulty overcoming the deleterious efforts of a fumbling staff. Senior leaders ensure a positive command climate because they understand that they must influence soldiers through layers of their subordinate leaders. They cultivate positive leadership among their immediate subordinates and resort to face–to–face persuasion to bolster will as the occasion warrants (but usually with subordinate commanders and staffs).

While discipline is primarily a direction–providing tool, in the sense that a disciplined soldier or unit does what is expected even when the "boss" is absent, maintaining discipline also plays a motivational role. A disciplined unit is responsive. One of its internalized values is "We always do what's right," and what is "right" is following the direction of the leader toward the *purpose* to be achieved.

Commanders at all levels establish or administer formal systems of rewards and punishments. Traditionally, on the positive side, this has been in the form of pay and benefits, promotions, decorations, skill badges, service ribbons, symbols of unit recognition and time off. On the negative side have been judicial and nonjudicial punishments ranging from extra training to the gallows, as well as release from the service and so forth. They use the provisions of military regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice to administer punishments. In order to motivate effectively, these systems must be seen to be fair by those they seek to motivate.

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Commanders at higher levels have a more powerful, more important and perhaps more difficult role in establishing and maintaining a just system of formal rewards and punishments. They have a more powerful role in that they have more latitude and authority. The importance of their role stems from the impact they have in this powerful tool to motivate positively through an effective system, and the potential damage they can cause with an ineffective system. Their role is difficult because they have to work through many people who administer the system.

As mentioned earlier, soldiers who understand why an action is necessary and worthy of their sacrifices will fight more fiercely or work harder toward unit goals and missions. This function of informing and educating also becomes more complex with seniority of position. At more senior levels, it involves command information programs of great complexity and subtlety.

Sustaining Continued Effectiveness. The final function of military leadership is different in that it orients to the future. Providing purpose, direction and motivation has immediate payoffs, but leaders must also ensure the continuity, health and further development of the organization. It is difficult to find one word to describe this function; the closest would be sustainment—sustaining the effectiveness of the organization over time. This implies continuity in a Darwinian rather than a static sense—the ability to remain a viable organism through adaptation as conditions change. It implies health in that all elements of an organism remain sound and function as intended. It implies further development in that leaders should never be satisfied with the current levels of proficiency and always seek to improve in areas which are weakest. Leaders should think of organizations they head as organisms and not as machines. Machines have no built-in recuperative powers, and they perform best when new. They wear out with use. This is not the case with organisms and organizations. Organisms can learn, adapt, grow, become more effective and stronger. They can also unlearn, maladapt, shrink, become less effective and weaker. And they can die. An organism cannot be stressed near maximum capacity for too long a time before it becomes less capable, but an organism can peak well above normal levels of effectiveness for short periods. Effective military leaders recognize these characteristics of military organizations and lead them accordingly.

Some have said that the most effective leaders provide for their succession. Others have said that they develop "high-performing" units. They do both and more. The good squad leader cross-trains the new man on the machinegun, teaches the machinegunner to be a team leader and coaches the team leaders. This squad leader trains the squad to be a cohesive and highly adaptive organism; looks for ways to take the

NCOs and soldiers of the 1st Armored Division checking their Chaparral missile system. Saudi Arabia, 22 February 1991.

Senior NCOs also practice "do as I do" leadership, often not as directly [as junior NCOs], but they do more. They are primarily responsible for junior NCO development. They execute policies, supervise activities and advise officers in the performance of all of their purpose, direction, motivation and organizational sustainment functions. They are the repository of organizational values.

pressure off when no expenditure of effort is required and ensures that squad members get needed rest when possible. When a tough chore is to be performed, the squad peaks for it.

Leaders at higher levels do essentially the same. The higher the level, the more systematic and institutionalized the process becomes. Senior leaders must prepare for attrition of key personnel, the introduction of more modern weapons and a myriad of environmental changes affecting the health and effectiveness of their command. In performing current tasks, they must consider future tasks. In combat, they may mortgage the future for a vital present mission or hold back to save strength and peak for a more vital task to come. They train their soldiers and leaders in peacetime and during lulls in battle. They build or rebuild morale or physical strength. They build teamwork between units of different branches and develop "high–performing" staffs. The essential elements of this function are present at all levels, but at the most senior levels these efforts are formalized and highly organized. In the long term, tending to this function is as important as providing purpose, direction and motivation.

Effective military leadership requires that four key functions be performed well to influence soldiers and units to successfully accomplish tasks and missions over time. To be successful, military leaders must:

- Provide purpose and meaning for unit activity—fitting the specific mission into a broader framework of guidance derived from higher purpose, direction, motivation and sustaining sensings.
- Establish direction and guidance for the actions of subordinates leading to mission accomplishment.
- Generate or instill in his subordinates the will, or motivation, to perform assigned missions well.
- Sustain the effectiveness of his organization over time—provide for the continuity, improvement and future effectiveness of the organization.

The effectiveness of large military organizations depends on the performance of all of these functions up and down the chain of command. Although these functions are performed at every link in the chain, they are performed differently at each level. While there is room for variations in style (or the way functions are performed), there is little room for variations in values and

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ethical standards or in the understanding of doctrinal fundamentals. These and the purpose function at each level provide the glue that binds smaller organizations together to form larger ones—to make them one organism.

Differences in Levels of Leadership. Intuition tells us that there may be distinct differences in the way the purpose, direction, motivation and organizational sustainment functions are performed, and what leaders must *be*, *know* and *do* to perform them at different levels. What follows is an intuitive sketch of some key distinctions by level based on 28 years of fallible experience and some historical reading over that time.

Junior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who serve as squad leaders and team leaders and their equivalents practice "do as I do" leadership almost exclusively. For them, "Showing" is as important as "telling." In combat, "Do as I do" leaders are at or near the front of their organizations to direct and to motivate effectively. They derive purpose from company–level goals, missions and values. They embody the warrior ethic of their branch and specialty and reflect the values inculcated in them by more senior NCOs. They provide direction by leading from the front, by establishing and enforcing squad standards and values, by demonstrating "how to do it." They enforce discipline directly and on the spot. They motivate by example and by the respect they have earned within the squad. They work to achieve a cohesive, "high–performing" squad. They care for and about their men. They provide for continuity by identifying talent among the younger soldiers and by providing for their own succession from among them. They cross–train soldiers to perform more than one task in the squad, and perform necessary individual training.

Senior NCOs (platoon sergeants, master sergeants, first sergeants and sergeants major) also practice "do as I do" leadership, often not as directly, but they do more. They are primarily responsible for junior NCO development. They execute policies, supervise activities and advise officers in the performance of all of their purpose, direction, motivation and organizational sustainment functions. They are the repository of organizational values.

Company grade officers also practice "do as I do" leadership. They lead literally and directly, face–to–face. (Some headquarters company commanders with close to 300 men performing disparate functions over a wide area may not fit this mold; they face a challenge similar to the next higher level.) They act as important value setters; making short–term policies, setting short–term goals and executing short–range tactical schemes. They make a given organization function. Their longer–range policies and goals are interpretations of higher–level ones and their plans are very dependent upon plans and priorities set above their level. They are expected to display initiative and continuity in the short–term execution of tasks.

Junior field grade officers alternate between indirect and "do as I do" leadership. They are the first level of real value shapers. They are responsible for company grade officer development. They make longer–term policies and set longer–term goals. They execute short–range combined arms tactical schemes. They make a task force with nonorganic parts function.

Indirect leadership is characterized by some physical detachment due to time and space. These leaders must work harder to maintain intellectual and spiritual attachment. Every leader beyond the lowest levels must understand that time and space limits those in the organization

whom the leader can touch personally. And this implies a decision as to whom within the organization, to how many and how far he can spread his personal influence. The leader must choose carefully, for there are pitfalls to spreading too thin as well as to staying too near the headquarters. One can visualize this as a series of concentric circles. There is a pitfall in bypassing a circle or two and trying to reach all the way down to deal with the soldier in the ranks too often. This affects the mutual trust within a chain of command. It is best to reach out by degrees and occasionally "test the waters" beyond the three rings any leader can influence effectively. Some may be better at reaching out farther. Each leader should know this "range" and stay within it.

Senior field grade and junior general officers practice mostly indirect leadership. They are important value shapers and are responsible for junior field grade development. They shape command climates in the Army. They are long–term policy makers and goal setters. They execute complex combined arms tactical schemes. They create task forces, shape organizations and make large, complex organizations function.

Senior general officers practice indirect leadership except on rare occasion and with a small segment of their subordinates. They lead other general officers and senior field grade officers in direct ways and work hard to shape consensus among their peers. They are the very long–range institutional value shapers. They are responsible for the development of field grade and junior general officers. They shape the command climate on Army posts, within major commands and within the Army for long periods of time. They make policies and set goals that have impact many years beyond their tenure. They are responsible for the execution of complex operational and strategic schemes. They create organizations and set long–range trends. They shape institutions and make long–term important decisions frequently based on intuition because easily recognizable tradeoffs are not apparent.

While there is room for variations in style (or the way functions are performed), there is little room for variations in values and ethical standards or in the understanding of doctrinal fundamentals. These and the purpose function at each level provide the glue that binds smaller organizations together to form larger ones—to make them one organism.

There are differences other than those identified in this short sketch, and they should be identified and studied. Study may reveal that this intuitive grouping of ranks is not the best. Whatever grouping is used, a matrix can be developed. This could be useful for developing effective leaders because we could then identify what the *be*, *know* and *do* requirements are for each level.

There is much written on the subject of leadership. US Army Field Manual (FM) 22–100, *Military Leadership* and FM 22–103, *Leadership and Command at Senior Levels*, are the best leadership manuals we have had. The historical record is full of useful material as are more recent studies by behavioral scientists. But until we undertake an orderly and scientific study of the functions of leadership and understand more fully what leaders must be, know and do at each level to effectively perform those functions in peace and war, we will only be partly informed. ***MR***

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